

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----118537 011851Z /42

R 011803Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4611
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 01991

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PCAT, MASS, BE, LY
SUBJECT: MILITARY SALES TO LIBYA

REF: STATE 24256

SUMMARY. WE APPROACHED FOREIGN MINISTRY AS INSTRUCTED
REFTEL. OUR DEMARCHE WILL BE BROUGHT TO FOREIGN
MINISTER SIMONET'S ATTENTION WHEN HE RETURNS FROM
HIS CURRENT TRIP ABROAD. INITIAL BELGIAN REACTION WAS
NEGATIVE. END SUMMARY.

1. WE DISCUSSED THE SALE OF MILITARY ITEMS TO LIBYA
WITH MAJ. GEN. GUY SOKAY, JANUARY 31, AND LEFT HIM
A NON-PAPER CONTAINING THE POINTS TRANSMITTED REFTTEL.
SOKAY IS THE OFFICER IN THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S CABINET
RESPONSIBLE FOR ARMS CONTROL POLICY AND CONTROLS
EXPORT LICENSES FOR MILITARY ITEMS. HE IS A SOCIALIST
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AND WAS PERSONALLY SELECTED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER
AS A PERSONAL CONFIDANT. IN A LENGTHY, WIDE-RANGING
DISCUSSION WITH SOKAY WE STRESSED LIBYA'S POTENTIAL
FOR CREATING DIFFICULTIES FOR THE CURRENT MIDDLE EAST
PEACE EFFORT AS WELL AS LIBYA'S WELL-KNOWN SUPPORT
OF TERRORIST MOVEMENTS AROUND THE WORLD. WE EXPRESSED
THE HOPE THAT BELGIUM WOULD SEE THIS MATTER IN THE

SAME LIGHT AS DID THE USG.

2. SOKAY WAS, AS USUAL, WILLING TO LISTEN TO OUR ARGUMENTS AND FRANK IN GIVING US HIS PRELIMINARY REACTION. HE PROMISED TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE WITH FOREIGN MINISTER SIMONET, WHEN LATTER RETURNS TO BELGIUM. HE TOLD US THAT SIMONET HAD REVIEWED THE GOB'S GENERAL POLICY ON ARMS SALES UPON TAKING OFFICE AND THAT BELGIAN SALES TO LIBYA HAS RECEIVED PARTICULAR ATTENTION. HE DREW OUR ATTENTION TO SIMONET'S RECENT ARMS POLICY STATEMENT IN PARLIAMENT (BRUSSELS A-15, JAN 19, 1978, NOTAL).

3. SOKAY SAID THAT BELGIUM COUNTS LIBYA AMONG ITS 30 TO 35 FOREIGN CLIENTS FOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT. HE REFUSED TO BE DRAWN OUT ON THE NATURE OR VOLUME OF BELGIAN SALES TO LIBYA, BUT REMINDED US THAT THE BELGIAN ARMS INDUSTRY SPECIALIZED IN MANUFACTURING SMALL ARMS AND MUNITIONS. HE TOLD US THAT THE GOB HAD TURNED DOWN A MASSIVE LIBYAN REQUEST TO CREATE AN ARMS INDUSTRY IN LIBYA. BELGIAN ARMS SALES, HE SAID, AMOUNT TO ONLY 1 OF BELGIUM'S EXPORTS, AND EACH SALES CONTRACT CONTAINS A CLAUSE AGAINST THE RE-EXPORTATION OF THE MATERIEL WITHOUT GOB PERMISSION. SOKAY DID NOT DENY OUR SUGGESTION THAT THIS LATTER PROVISION WAS PROBABLY INEFFECTIVE
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AND THAT NO REAL CONTROLS EXISTED.

4. SOKAY COMMENTED THAT OUR DEMARCHE PULLED THE GOB IN TWO DIRECTIONS: IT WOULD LIKE TO COOPERATE WITH THE USG AS A FRIEND AND ALLY, BUT IT MUST ALSO TAKE BELGIUM'S PRESENT "CATASTROPHIC" ECONOMIC SITUATION INTO ACCOUNT AND PROTECT THE JOBS OF THOSE ENGAGED IN THE MANUFACTURE OF ARMAMENTS AND MUNITIONS. WITH SPECIFIC REGARD TO LIBYA, SOKAY SAID THAT SHORTLY AFTER THE SOCIALISTS ENTERED THE TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT HE HAD BEEN DIRECTED TO EXPLORE A CUTOFF OF BELGIAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT TO LIBYA WITH THE SOCIALIST MINISTER FOR WALLOON AFFAIRS, GUY MATHOT. MATHOT, WHOSE HOME AND POLITICAL BASE IS SERAING (WHERE FN, ONE OF BELGIUM'S LARGEST ARMS MANUFACTURERS IS LOCATED) CAME OUT FLATLY IN FAVOR OF JOBS. SOKAY TOLD US THAT WHILE THE SOCIALISTS HAD A LONG-TERM, IDEOLOGICALLY-MOTIVATED GOAL TO URGE BELGIAN INDUSTRY TO RECONVERT AWAY FROM ARMAMENTS, NO SUCH GOAL COULD BE SERIOUSLY DISCUSSED FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

5. SOKAY SAID FURTHER THAT BELGIUM HAD LEARNED FROM

PAST BAD EXPERIENCES THAT AN EMBARGO BY SOME COUNTRIES ON ARMS EXPORTS DIRECTED AT A SPECIFIC COUNTRY SIMPLY DID NOT WORK AND RESULTED ONLY IN THE PERMANENT LOSS OF A MARKET FOR THOSE WHO EXERCISED SELF-RESTRAINT. HE CITED, AS AN EXAMPLE, THE BELIZE-GUATEMALA CRISIS. THE BRITISH ASKED THE GOB TO STOP ARMS SALES TO GUATEMALA, WHICH THE BELGIANS DID. THE PORTUGUESE IMMEDIATELY REPLACED THE BELGIANS AS SUPPLIERS

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EXDIS

AND THE GUATEMALA MARKET WAS PERMANENTLY LOST TO BELGIUM.

6. SOKAY DREW A DISTINCTION BETWEEN U.S. AND BELGIAN ARMS SALES, WHICH HE SAID MADE SELF-RESTRAINT MORE DIFFICULT FOR BELGIUM. U.S. ARMS SALES ARE MOST OFTEN FOR ITEMS IN WHICH THERE ARE NO CLEAR COMPETITORS ON QUALITY, TECHNOLOGY OR COST, E.G. HAWK, F-16, ETC. BELGIUM'S ARMS HAVE MANY COMPETITORS ON THE SAME QUALITY, TECHNOLOGY AND COST BASIS. THEREFORE, HE CONCLUDED, THAT THE USG COULD AFFORD TO IMPOSE A HIATUS ON SALES KNOWING THAT IT COULD RECAPTURE THE MARKET WHEN IT CHOSE, BUT IF BELGIUM LOST A MARKET, IT WAS A PERMANENT LOSS TO A COMPETITOR.

7. WITHOUT PROVIDING SPECIFICS, SOKAY SAID THAT

THE WEST GERMANS, FRENCH AND POSSIBLY THE ITALIANS
WERE THE BIGGEST WESTERN SUPPLIERS OF ARMS TO LIBYA.
HE SAID THAT THE WEST GERMANS WOULD SELL ARMS TO
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ANYONE AS LONG AS THE SALES WERE MADE THROUGH
THIRD PARTIES. HE TOLD US THAT THE FRG HAD SOLD OFF
ITS ENTIRE STOCK OF BELGIAN-PRODUCED FAL'S IN THIS
FASHION, WHEN THE WEST GERMAN ARMY HAD BEEN
REEQUIPPED WITH A GERMAN-PRODUCED LIGHT INFANTRY WEAPON.
SOKAY FURTHER NOTED THAT FRANCE IS THE THIRD LARGEST
EXPORTER OF ARMS IN THE WORLD AND THAT FRENCH ARMS
EXPORTS MADE UP 7 OF FRANCES'S TOTAL EXPORTS.

8. COMMENT: WHILE USG VIEWS AND OUR ARGUMENTS WILL
BE REVIEWED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER, WE WERE NOT
ENCOURAGED TO BELIEVE THAT THE GOB WILL ACCEPT THEM
IN LIGHT OF GENERAL SOKAY'S INITIAL REACTION. CHAMBERS

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